

THE EXISTENCE OF GRADE INFLATION IN OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

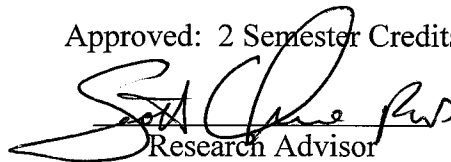
by

Duane Joseph Bauer

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Guidance and Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



Research Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

August, 2004

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751

ABSTRACT

Bauer	Duane	J.	
(Writer) (Last Name)	(First Name)	(Middle Initial)	
The Existence of Grade Inflation in Our Educational System			
(Title)			
School Counseling	Dr. Scott Orme	July, 2004	
(Graduate Program)	(Research Advisor)	(Month/Year)	(# of Pages)
Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Edition			
(Name of Style Manual Used in this Study)			

Grades have been used as a tool to evaluate students in our educational system. Parents, employers and college admissions as well as the students, rely on grades for various reasons. Over time, there has been controversy surrounding the issue of whether the grades given have been truly earned.

This literature review examined the research as it related to the existence of grade inflation and if it indeed was occurring, what some of the repercussions were. Although the topic is still controversial in academic circles, the literature reviewed for this paper found clear evidence of an increase in overall grades for both high school and college students. Possible causes including improved student skills, enabling improved self-concept, and “leveling the playing field” were all investigated in this paper.

Solutions were also offered in the literature review. Some schools have reintroduced the letter grade of D while others now allow students to actually fail. Doing away with student evaluations of faculty members, reinstituting lower letter grades, and developing alternative evaluation systems were ideas put forth by the various authors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>Purpose of Study</i>	3
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	4
<i>Why We Grade</i>	4
<i>Why Grade Inflation Has Occurred</i>	4
<i>Statistical Evidence of Grade Inflation</i>	9
<i>Repercussions/Effects of Grade Inflation</i>	10
<i>Solutions to Grade Inflation</i>	13
CHAPTER III: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15
<i>Summary</i>	15
<i>Consequences</i>	17
<i>Future Directions</i>	18
<i>Strengths and Limitations</i>	19
References.....	20

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Plenty of High Marks10

Table 2 Mean GPA's at a Variety of Institutions.....11

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

It seems that each generation believes that they had it much tougher than the subsequent generations. Whether it is how hard they had to work, what a dollar would buy or what the standards of society were at the time, most seem to think it was more difficult in the past. So seems to be the case with grades. There are many that are under the impression that an A today is not the same as it was only a few years back. While there is no specific date that is touted as the day an A wasn't really an A, many studies refer back to the 1960's. The sixties have been blamed for many things and now it seems that devaluing grades can be added to the list (Seligman, 2002). Grade inflation is defined as "a rise in academic grades not accompanied by a commensurate increase in academic achievement (Zirkel, 1999). Harvard officially refers to grade inflation as "upward grade homogenization" (Wilson, 1999). When the topic is confronted, there are few people who do not have an opinion on the subject, and there is rarely a middle ground. People either strongly believe it is happening or they deny its very existence (Seligman, 2002). There are also individuals who feel strongly that it is irrelevant whether it is reality or not. Since everyone's grades are boosted upward, there actually is no difference. The argument is no one is harmed so why should anyone care? Others may argue that the top students will not strive to achieve. Others argue that grades are not inflated today, but that today's students are smarter. In all likelihood students will put forth this theory. Since the 1970's, grade inflation has been in the news, which led many parents to assume that inflating grades was occurring. Parents then asked that basic skills be taught versus supporting educational innovations which emphasized affective rather than cognitive objectives (Handleman, 1977). It appears that the public does indeed believe that schools are

relaxing standards for curriculum, instruction, grading, and student promotion (Handleman, 1977). In all likelihood, the general public is looking at this from an economic standpoint. If they are paying taxes to support our education system, they expect students to be held accountable. However, others may feel that if they are paying high tuition costs in order for their son/daughter to receive an education, they expect a decent grade for their child. President Bush has used the word “accountability” many times when talking about teachers and our education system (Archibald, 2003). Another important point in the discussion of grade inflation stems from the argument that when grade inflation occurs, grades themselves lose their meaning. Prospective employers are sometimes unable to distinguish the top-students in terms of GPA, versus the students that may have benefited from grade inflation (Watson, 1997). This is obviously unfair to the students who worked hard and deserved the grades they received. Watson also asserts that grade inflation occurs at the high school level so as to allow students to get accepted into the top colleges and universities. Grade inflation has made it more difficult for graduate schools to screen applicants into their programs. Admissions teams must now resort to other means of selecting graduate students, such as relying on standardized tests (Shapiro, 2002). Shapiro stated that graduate schools are unable to rely on the students transcripts in order to aid in the selection process. He also believes because grades have basically lost their meaning, society actually must spend huge quantities of money assessing people since grades cannot be used as an instrument to do so. He gives the example of a campus in the California State University system that hired a Vice President for Assessment in order to give information that in the past was acquired by looking at one’s grades.

Regardless of whether one believes that grade inflation is reality or not, there is no doubt that it is a topic discussed by many. It has become such a hot topic and controversy that instructors have lost their jobs and lawsuits have ensued related to this issue (Wilson, 2002). In the world of education, change can be slow. Getting people to agree whether there even is a problem has been a difficult task.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is determine to what extent grade inflation is occurring- if is occurring at all. Also to evaluate who may be to blame, the possible consequences of and what some solutions are to grade inflation.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on relevant literature concerning grade inflation in schools. First a brief overview of why educators grade in the first place will be given, followed by an investigation of the evidence for grade inflation. Statistics showing grade inflation, repercussions of grade inflation and effects of grade inflation will then be examined.

Why We Grade

Grading students has been in existence for a long time. Before discussing grade inflation, it is important to investigate the justification for grading in the first place. Grading separates individuals into categories usually based on performance or ability within an academic domain. Most people would agree on the general purpose of grading—to provide feedback to students, parents, and others on student performance (Birk, 2004). Finding a consensus on what criteria to use for grading is a different story (Birk, 2004). According to Bradford Wilson (1999), grading individuals makes distinctions between excellence and competence, and between competence and incompetence. In other words it separates those that do “something” well and those that do not do this same “something” as well (Wilson, 1999).

Why Grade Inflation Has Occurred

Most of the articles that describe the concept of grade inflation are in agreement that it is reality. According to some, it has gotten out of hand. One college admission representative characterized grade inflation as “obscene” and said it is one of the prime reasons why college admissions offices are relying more and more on SAT scores (Ordovensky, 1996). So the question arises as to why it has occurred. One reason given is

that inflating a grade will result in a boost in self-esteem for that student (Sykes, 1995). This will thus allow for a pleasant atmosphere for the instructor and the students. It argues that everyone will think well of one another and consequently this will raise achievement levels (Sykes, 1995). Along these same lines, Linda Sax, director of the UCLA Higher Education Research Institutes annual freshmen survey reports that “teachers are under some pressure to give students the benefit of the doubt” with regards to grades. Sax stated that incoming freshmen are reporting to be under an all-time-high stress level. She also states that applying to college, working long hours after school and volunteering is taking its toll on our high school seniors (Wildavsky, 2000). Dan Seligman, writing for Forbes magazine said instructors were “encouraged to feel guilty about past oppression of women and minorities” and “are especially loath to grade them strictly and, having failed to do so, feel obliged to apply the same generous standards to other students.” So in effect grade inflation occurred for all because the feelings of some dictate the grade they received (Seligman, 2002). Some schools have actually eliminated low letter grades altogether. One school in Maryland no longer gives D’s and another in California eliminated F’s (Hanson, 1997).

At the university level, professors may have personal as well as professional reasons for inflating grades. Stuart Rojstaczer wrote in the Washington Post that he no longer gives any grade lower than a B. He stated that if he were to do so, fewer students would sign up for his courses and his teaching career would suffer. He indicated that he is simply doing what everyone-parents, students and the universities want him to: give high grades regardless of merit (Bartlett, 2003). According to Bartlett, Rojstaczer defends this practice by reminding us that he is not alone in grade inflation; it is occurring at every

major university. The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that Harvey C. Mansfield, a professor of government at Harvard University, has acknowledged that studies have shown a positive correlation between grade inflation and the use of student evaluations. Mansfield also agreed that “many teachers no longer want to seriously engage the work of their students. Their priorities are elsewhere (research, consulting, etc.). Therefore it is easier to simply hand out gold stars on student work so that they can quickly return to their own work (Bray, 2001, p.2) The Vietnam War also encouraged grade inflation. Sympathetic professors were said to go easy on male students, so their student deferments were not lost. This of course kept them from being drafted (Bartlett, 2003). Student reviews/evaluations also have been a cause of instructors doling out high grades. Professors get the message pretty quickly that “A “ students give them better reviews and these reviews may lead to tenure and raises-while the opposite occurs for tough graders (Christian Science Monitor, 2001). There have been several studies in various disciplines that have found significant correlations between student ratings of instructors and expected grades of students (Cashin, 1988; Goldberg & Callahan, 1991; Hudson, 1989). For example, a recent study at the University of Washington found that professors who were easy graders received better student evaluations than did the professors who were tougher (Archibold, 1998; Wilson, 1998). In a national survey of deans of colleges of education and of colleges of arts and sciences, over 70% of the respondents agreed that the use of student evaluations as a consideration for promotion and tenure was a major reason for grade inflation (Nelson & Lynch, 1984). In essence, professors are not giving grades for what has been accomplished by students but what may be done to them (the professor) by the students in relation to evaluations.

Another argument which explains the reason grades are higher is that students today are simply smarter than students were in the past. Students today are likely to cite this as a reason for their increased GPA. Evidence however may not favor this argument. Linda Saxe stated “We don’t think this grade inflation is happening because these students are getting any smarter. There are no other indicators that would suggest that student’s level of achievement has gone up over the past 30 years” (Wildavsky, 2000, p. 50).” Indeed, the College Board reported last year that falling SAT scores were accompanied by rising grades. More than 34 percent of freshmen in this year’s UCLA survey reported earning an A average in high school, compared with a low of just 12.5 percent in 1969 (Wildavsky, 2000). Bruce Bartlett reported that according to the College Entrance Examination Board, the average combined score on the Scholastic Assessment Test (formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test) has fallen from 1059 in 1967 to 1020 in 2002. However, this greatly understates the magnitude of the decline because in 1995 the SAT was “renormed.” In practice, this statistic legerdemain added 100 points to everyone’s score-76 points to the verbal and 24 points to the math score (Bartlett, 2003).

Not everyone is in agreement that student’s grades actually are inflated. An example of this comes from Professor Noel Perrin of Dartmouth College. He reported that in the old Dartmouth of forty years ago, professors gave out grades assuming that a C indeed was average. However, Dartmouth noticed its students were not doing as well in the competition for graduate school admissions. So in other words, Dartmouth was actually grading too harshly. Presently, he stated that “we take into account the vast pool of college students nationwide, all five million of them. That is, we imagine our students at a mythical Average U., and give the grades they would get there.” (Perrin, 1998,

pA68). In a RAND study that examined the transcripts and test scores of nearly 24,000 students who took part in two federally research projects: the High School and Beyond study and the National Education Longitudinally Study of 1988, it suggested that grade inflation might only be true for certain populations or time periods (Viadero, 2001).

While math grades did in fact creep up over those years, test scores rose even more.

When the score increases were taken into account, the researchers found that students' math grades actually declined from 1982 to 1992 (Viadero, 2001). Perhaps the strongest voice denying grade inflation has occurred or is a problem is that of Alfie Kohn. He said that complaints about grade inflation have been around for a long time. One of his arguments against grade inflation being reality stems from the fact that some of the studies rely on self-reports which he says are notoriously unreliable, and the numbers become even more dubious when only a self-selected, and possibly unrepresentative, segment bothers to return the questionnaires. Kohn indicated that even if grades are higher today than the past, the proof that they are undeserved and inflated needs to be proven by the critics (Kohn, 2002). Kohn said the students may be turning in better assignments. Maybe instructors used to be too stingy with their marks and have become more reasonable. Kohn said "the real question, then, is why we spent so many years trying to make good students look bad" (Kohn, 2002, p.2). Finally, Kohn said there is no evidence that students today get A's for the same work that used to receive B's or C's. Because Kohn claims there is no evidence of grade inflation occurring, statistics will be examined which may help in viewing the issue.

Statistical Evidence of Grade Inflation

There are many research studies dealing with the concept of grade inflation. Most support the notion of its existence. The following information supports this. Over 31% of entering freshmen at UCLA reported that their grade averages were A- or higher in high school, compared to 12.5% in 1969 (Weiss, 1997). The College Board reported that the high school GPA of those who took the SAT nationally was 3.22 in 1997 compared to 3.07 in 1987 (Hardy, 1998). Yet, the more recent test takers are generally reputed to be a more diverse, broader segment of the student population, and their SAT results reflect a declining average (Zirkel, 1999). In 1969, 7% of college grades were A's. The figure rose to 26% by 1993 and, presumably has risen more since then (Seligman, 2002). Seligman also noted that in the mid 1990s, when students had average math scores around 480 and verbal scores around 425, the College Board decided to do a little inflating of its own (Seligman, 2002). Evidently concerned that people would not realize that lower verbal scores could be just as good (in percentile terms) as higher math scores, the board decided to "recenter" all scores, so that in both tests, average scores came out at a neat 500. After the new scoring, the number of students scoring a 1600 (perfect score), was 587 in 2001 compared to an average of 11 in the 15 years prior to the new scoring (Seligman, 2002). Harvard is a university cited many times for its ever increasing GPA's. In 2000, half of all grades at Harvard were A's, up from a third in 1985. Additionally, in 2000, 91% of Harvard seniors graduated with honors. This led the university to put a cap on such honors beginning in 2005 (Bartlett, 2003). At Duke University, the average student grade is an A-. Oberlin College offers no grade below a C- and has a system of internal and external transcripts, one that records withdrawals and one that obscures such

information. At Harvard, no grade below a B is given. At Princeton University, more than 40% of the grades are A's. Prior to 1995, 90% of the grades given at Stanford University were A's or B's (Watson, 1997). Jon Marshall writing in *The Christian Science Monitor* (1997) traced the increase in GPA's over a ten year period (Table 1). Bradford Wilson also showed in his *National Forum* article (1999) that mean GPA's at selected universities have been rising (Table 2).

Table 1

Plenty of High Marks

	<u>Percentage of students</u>			
GPA	1970	1980	1990	1996
3.5-4.0	16%	21%	23%	32%
3.0-3.4	21	31	30	31
2.5-2.9	26	22	22	20
2.0-2.4	25	18	18	13
1.5-1.9	10	6	6	4
<u>0.5-1.4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>

Based on A=4.0, B=3.0, C=2.0, D=1.0

Source ACT Inc.

Repercussions/Effects of Grade Inflation

Assuming that grade inflation is actually occurring, are there any consequences associated with these unearned grades? Research appears to say there are. Grade inflation generally promotes lower academic standards (Basinger, 1997). It also gives students a distorted view of their academic achievements and their abilities (Baummeister, 1996).

Table 2

Mean GPA's at a Variety of Institutions

Duke University	1969 average GPA of 2.7
	1996 average GPA of 3.3
Lehigh University	1972 average GPA of
	1996 average GPA of 2.9
Pacific Lutheran	1974 average GPA of 2.99
University	1996 average GPA of 3.2
UC, Berkely	1986 average GPA of 2.95
	1996 average GPA of 3.10
University of	1964 average GPA of 2.31
<u>Washington</u>	<u>1996 average GPA of 3.12</u>

(Gose, 1997)

These factors may mislead students into believing they are better prepared for the world of work than they actually are. Because grades do not represent students' abilities and achievements accurately, employers are less able to identify qualified candidates (Gose, 1997) and many must provide additional training for new employees. Another consequence of grade inflation is that undergraduate degrees will be viewed as high school diplomas are today. Some colleges will institute exit exams to bolster the sagging value of their degrees. Graduate schools will increasingly depend on the Graduate Record Exam, as medical and law schools now lean so heavily on the MSAT and LSAT. Predictably, business and industry will increasingly disregard college degrees in matters of placement and promotion, relying instead on their own in-house evaluations

(Goldman, 1985). Northwestern University's associate provost for enrollment, Rebecca Dixon, sees student after student applying to college with a lofty high school GPA (Marshall, 1997). Figuring out who the outstanding students really are has become much more difficult. "You begin to wonder how everyone can get a straight-A average," says Dixon from her office in Evanston, IL (Marshall, 1997, p12). The main victims of grade inflation are the truly superior students, who are no longer clearly differentiated from those who are just pretty good (Seligman, 2002). A system that makes good grades easier to get has to be reducing learning incentives at all levels (Seligman, 2002). Another consequence of grade inflation is that students may be discouraged from taking science courses, where the nature of the subject matter has held down grade inflation, in favor of those in the humanities, where it is rampant. Over time, this has caused universities to drain resources from science programs. Eventually, this will harm economic growth by reducing technological innovation and advancement (Bartlett, 2003). Bartlett also claimed that grade inflation discourages students from giving their best effort. Why should they when other students doing half as much work get the same grades they do? At the same time, professors have no way of encouraging their best students because they can't give grades higher than an A. The result is a general "dumbing down" of achievement and quality in the higher education system, while students and their potential employers are deluded into thinking that everything is okay (Bartlett, 2003). When students at schools that prohibit professors from issuing failing or average grades apply for graduate school, they have an advantage over students at less prestigious institutions where the grading system is usually much more stringent (Watson, 1997). It is unlikely the student from the non-prestigious institution will be able to compete with

student from the prestigious institution. Finally, people's very jobs and livelihood may be on the line due to grade inflation. A professor at Temple University was fired for what the university called "incompetence". Martin M. Eisen, who had taught at Temple for 34 years claimed he was fired for refusing to pass students who could not do college-level work. Three faculty panels decided he was an extremely harsh grader who was rude and unhelpful to students. Eisen said the university admitted unprepared students and wanted him to dumb down his courses so students could pass. His case marked the first time Temple had dismissed a tenured professor for negligence. However, in the settlement that stemmed from the firing, Eisen was set to receive a cash settlement as well as medical benefits (Wilson, 2002). So the question now becomes, what can be done about this inflating of grades?

Solutions to Grade Inflation

Many of the same individuals who believe grade inflation is a problem also have suggestions on how to deal with it. One such idea is to replace letter grades with qualitative assessments such as narrative descriptions of students' work, parent teacher conferences, etc. Some advantages of qualitative assessments include: They allow teachers to describe, with complexity and nuance, a student's learning process, and therefore offer parents and students more insight into the student's progress. The downside of this type of assessment is the time it would take to writing the narratives for 100 to 200 students. So, for better or worse, college admissions boards and employers often prefer grades and numbers over narratives (Birk, 2004). Ranking students as well as giving them a grade may help employers better understand whether the A that a student earned in a course represents excellence or merely shows a professor who gives most

students an A. Dartmouth College has already instituted this system (Gasner,2002).

Allowing students to again earn failing grades is yet another possible solution. Stanford has brought back the F grade in the form of NP (not passed), Princeton and Yale have added a D grade to their pass-fail option, and Lewis and Clark College has revived the D grade (Wildasky, 1994). Schools also need to clearly define what high quality work is. Students need to be exposed to the excellent work of others and to be guided in making comparisons between these efforts and their own work. They need to be taught self-evaluation skills and allowed to use these skills in assessing their own work. The validity of their assessments should be of prime importance. No student should be allowed to go through school believing his or her work is of high quality when the quality is seriously lacking (Edwards, 2000). Edwards also reported that students should work on fewer, but more comprehensive and involved projects. He said that traditional curriculum is inherently superficial and should be replaced by opportunities that allow students to go into depth on fewer topics. Another idea to combat grade inflation is to do away with student evaluations. Instead, replace them with a panel of instructors who could devote time to help on another improve their performance. Such panels of cohorts are far more likely to enhance teacher's abilities than student's assessments, and the many problems associated with student evaluations could be avoided (Edwards, 2000).

CHAPTER III: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to discuss the relevant literature on the topic of grade inflation. The concept of grade inflation has been around for a long time. Some do believe that the 1960's were the true starting point for grade inflation (Wilson, 1999). Much of the research available does make comparisons between grades that were given in the 1960's versus grades given more recently.

The major argument put forth by those who believe grade inflation is real is based on the studies that have shown a correlation between lower grades years or even decades ago, and higher grades in more contemporary times. Most of the research did support the notion that grades were lower in the past than they are today (Juola, 1980).

There were several reasons given to explain the reasoning behind the inflating of grades. Self-esteem is a topic that is constantly being discussed in schools and elsewhere. It seems that our society is all too quick to blame adults for damaging our youngster's self-esteem. Thus giving higher grades is thought to be one method of boosting student's self-esteem. Everyone will feel good about themselves and one another which should lead to a kinder, gentler learning environment (Sykes, 1995). Along these same lines, it seems that affirmative action in regards to grading may also be in place in some schools. In the past, various groups have been victimized by racism and sexism. In order to make up for this discrimination, these groups now enjoy the privilege of getting grades that are unearned. Since these students are not graded harshly, the instructors do not feel anyone should be, thus the whole lot of them get high but undeserved grades (Seligman, 2002)

Professors themselves knowingly give students higher grades than they deserve. The reason they do so is self-preservation. If they grade hard, they have no students. Without students, the professor is no longer employed (Bartlett, 2003). Student evaluations are also cited as a major reason high grades are given out freely. The professors realize that if their evaluations tend to be negative, they may not be employed much longer. Disgruntled students do not evaluate professors in a positive manner (Bray, 2001).

Some will argue that today's students are smarter and deserve these high marks. However the numbers do not support this. Schools have given out more A's while the SAT scores have actually been falling (Wildavsky, 2000).

Even though the vast majority of research indicates there is strong evidence that grade inflation exists, everyone does not agree. Professor Noel Perrin believes that his University, Dartmouth graded too harshly in the past and now needs to grade less so, in order for Dartmouth's students to have the same opportunities as students from other universities (Perrin, 1998).

There are studies that have shown grade inflation to be a myth. A RAND study showed that over a ten year period math grades did creep up, however the students test scores went up at a faster rate than their grades did (Viadero, 2001). The father of grade inflation denial is Alfie Kohn. Kohn's biggest concern is grade inflation data many times relies on self-reporting. He also claims that even if grades are higher, maybe the student work indeed is better (Kohn, 2001). Kohn did not use statistics to support his argument.

Most of the articles dealing with grade inflation relied on statistics to support the notion that grade inflation is reality. What is consistently shown is the number of A's

given is higher today than it was in the past. For example, 31.5% of entering freshmen at UCLA reported that their grade averages were A- or higher in high school, compared to 12.5% in 1969 (Weiss, 1997). This statistic is similar to most of those found in the studies examined.

Consequences

If grade inflation is occurring, what are the consequences? One consequence seems to be confusion. College admissions are uncertain who the best students are since so many have a 4.0 or close to it. Employers also are confused because they may not know which candidate truly is the most qualified since they all look awesome on paper (Gose, 1997). The best students also may be confused since they were taught that hard work pays off, but if others are working very hard and are getting the same high marks that they are, what is the point of doing their best?

The question of what to do about grade inflation has been answered by some. One solution is to have teachers give a written narrative of each student's work. This would enable a detailed description of the student's learning and thinking process (Birk, 2004). Another idea is to rank students. This will allow employers and others to know where each student stood in terms of his/her peers. This would be helpful especially if the student's professor was of the mindset that everyone deserves an A (Gasner, 2002). Finally, doing away with student evaluations may combat grade inflation since professors will not have to worry about repercussions from angry students who were not given an A (Edwards, 2000).

Future Directions

The grade inflation controversy will most likely not end soon. The likelihood of everyone agreeing that it even exists is unlikely. Even some people who admit it exists do not consider it a problem (Seligman, 2002). The belief is that everyone feels good about the high grades while at the same time, no one is harmed. Obviously, this belief can be challenged and turned completely around so as to show that everyone is harmed since no one really knows who the best students are.

Some schools are trying to change their grading system to show which students are really the best. Dartmouth College gives two grades for each student. One shows the grade they earned and the second grade shows the median grade made by the entire class. This appears to be a good way to show how the students have done compared to their peers (Christian Science Monitor, 2001). Another area that could be examined is what role extra credit plays in the increase in high GPA's. If it indeed has a major impact on grades, then one could assume it is an area that could be deemed part of the grade inflation problem. The use of student evaluations as a tool for administrators to evaluate their instructors is another area that needs to be looked at. Students tend to evaluate instructors more favorably if the instructor is an easy grader (Edwards, 2000). The solution which seems to make the most sense is for schools to simply raise their standards and let everyone know they are doing so. Paxon High school in Florida did exactly that. One of the students interviewed, who by the way had a 4.0 GPA after her junior year, said her grades indeed dropped her senior year but she learned a lot more (Mitchell, 1997). As a matter of fact, her GPA was a 3.4 by the time graduation came. The odds of school districts changing their grading system or raising their standards is not very high.

The entire staff and school board would have to be on the same page. This of course is not likely.

Strengths and Limitations

There are several limitations when doing a literature review. There were many articles concerning the topic of grade inflation. The viewpoint which was most represented was that which supported the existence of grade inflation. This would of course help a researcher more if that was the stance taken. On the other hand, the researcher who did not believe in the widespread existence of grade inflation would not find as many articles supporting that belief.

There are limitations on knowing whether grade inflation is a small or large problem in schools. Each school system or even individual instructor determines what constitutes each letter grade. The research showed that different educators used different criteria when determining their student's grades. For example, some gave emphasis to effort while others did not. In fact, according to a survey by H. Parker Blount of Georgia State University, 86 percent of surveyed teachers used student effort as part of their grading criteria (Birk, 2004).

Grade inflation is a controversial issue. Some schools have taking steps to deal with it. Stanford now allows students to receive a failing grade in the form of NP (not passed), and Lewis and Clark College have revived the letter grade D (Wildasky, 1994). However since each state controls their own education system, it appears unlikely that even if everyone admits to the existence of widespread grade inflation, a nationwide solution would be agreed upon. So grade inflation will continue to be a topic which can be discussed, argued and pondering in the future.

References

- Archibald, G. (2003). NEA rejects outline by Bush for schools. Retrieved July 3, 2004, from http://www.washingtontimes.com/functions/print.php?storyID=20030702_113114_4904r.
- Archibold, R. (1998). Just Because the Grades are up, are Princeton Students Smarter? New York Times, P.1.
- Bartlett, B. (2003). The truth about grade inflation. Retrieved January 23, 2004 from <http://www.ncpa.org/edo/bb/2003/bb020303.html>.
- Basinger, D. (1997). Fighting grade inflation: A misguided effort? *College Teaching*, 45, 8891.
- Baummeistr, R. F. (1996). Should schools try to boost self-esteem? *American Educator*, 22, 14-19.
- Birk, L. (2004). Grade inflation: What's really behind all those A's? Retrieved January 23, 2004, from <http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/2000-jf/grades.shtml>.
- Bray, S.H. (2001). Grade inflation: Its causes and cures. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 47 (34). Retrieved February 29, 2004 from <http://chronicle.com/colloquy/2001/04/grades/>.
- Cashin, W. (1988). Student ratings of teaching: A summary of the research. Manhattan: Kansas State University, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 302 567).
- Christian Science Monitor (2001). Licking grade inflation. *Christian Science Monitor*, 93 (240), 8.
- Edwards, C. (Spring 2000). Grade inflation: The effects on educational quality and personal well being. *Education*, 120 (3), 538-547.

- Gasner, C. (2002). Professors tackle grade inflation. Retrieved February 2, 2004 from http://www.cw.ua.edu/vnews/display.v?TARGET=printable&article_ed=3d7clcaa4a639.
- Goldberg, G. & Callahan, J. (1991). Objectivity of student evaluations of instructors. *Journal of Education for Business*, 66, 377-378.
- Goldman, L. (1985). The betrayal of the gatekeepers: Grade inflation. *Journal of General Education*, 37 (2), 97-121.
- Gose, B. (1997). Efforts to curb grade inflation get an F from many critics. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 43, A41-A42.
- Handleman, C. (1977). The decline in academic standards. Retrieved January 3, 2004, from <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=ED147351&dp=eric>.
- Hanson, D. (1997). California high school has "no D" policy [Letter to the editor]. *Education Week*, 50.
- Hardy, L. (1997). Grade inflation. *American School Board Journal*, 18 (12), 28-29.
- Hudson, J. (1989). Expected grades correlate with evaluation of teaching? *Journalism Educator*, 44, 38-44.
- Juola, A. (1980). Grade inflation in higher education -- 1979: Is it over? (ED 189 129).
- Kohn, A. (2002). The dangerous myth of grade inflation. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49 (11). Retrieved January 23, 2004 from <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/gi.htm>.
- Marshall, J. (1997). Seniors boast higher grades, so-so SAT Scores. *Christian Science Monitor*, 89 (198), 12.

- Mitchell, N. (1997). Thousands of students victims of 'grade inflation'. Retrieved June 18, 2004, from <http://schoolmatch.com/audit/jacksonville/articles/gradezz.htm>.
- Nelson, J., & Lynch, K. (1984). Grade inflation, real income, simultaneity, and teaching evaluations. *Journal of Economic Education*, 15, 21-37.
- Ordovensky, P. (1996). Test Critics Decry Trend. *USA Today*, 1-2.
- Perrin, N. (1998). How students at Dartmouth came to deserve better grades. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, A68.
- Seligman, D. (2002). The grade-inflation swindle. *Forbes*, 169 (6), 94.
- Shapiro, M. (2002). Grade inflation: Myths, realities, and consequences. *The Irascible Professor*: Retrieved June 21, 2004, from <http://irascibleprofessor.com/comments-02-10-02-epr.htm>
- Sykes, C. (1995). *Dumbing Down our Kids*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- Viadero, D. (2001). Reports of grade inflation may be inflated, study says. *Education Week*, 21 (6) 5.
- Watson, E. (1997). College grade inflation getting out of hand. *Headway*, 9 (5), 27.
- Weiss, K. (1997). Survey finds record stress in class of 2000. *Los Angeles Times*, P. A1.
- Wildavsky, B. (1994). The grade inflation reverberation hits campus. *San Francisco Chronicle*, P.1.
- Wildavsky, B. (2000). At least they have high esteem. *U.S. News and World Report*, 128 (5), 50.
- Wilson, B. (1999). The phenomenon of grade inflation in higher education. *National Forum*, 79 (4), 38.

Wilson, R. (2002). Ousted math professor settles suit with Temple U. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49 (7), 1.

Zirkel, P.A. (1999). Grade inflation: A leadership opportunity for schools of education? *Teachers College Record*, 101(2), 247-261.